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ABSTRACT

This report examines how the development of literacy in the native language plays a role in the acquisition of second language literacy, and how educators may determine when a student is ready to transition into English-only literacy programs by assessing the transfer of skills. In this report, transitional programs refer to instructional programs for students who have been schooled in their native language and are now in "transitional" classrooms receiving literacy instruction in English. Transition usually occurs during elementary school but may occur in middle and high school for older, recently arrived students who are entering English-only literacy programs. Regarding literacy development and transition from a first to a second language, the paper highlights school age children who are acquiring English as a Second Language, where English is the societal language.This report reviews relevant evaluation studies and studies that investigate the transfer of skills from a first language to English. Understanding these aspects of transfer is important in planning transition programs. The information helps educators determine when English language learners should be transitioned into English instruction and the skills they are likely to have learned that will support English literacy acquisition. The paper discusses the relationship between English oral proficiency and literacy instruction in English and the ensuing educational implications, describing the elements of successful transition programs for English language learners. It concludes with recommendations for research and practice. (Contains 67 references.) (SM)

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TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Contextual Factors and Effective Programming

Diane August

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TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS
Contextual Factors and Effective Programming

Diane August

August and Associates

Report No. 58

May 2002

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THE CENTER

Every child has the capacity to succeed in school and in life. Yet far too many children fail to meet their potential. Many students, especially those from poor and minority families, are placed at risk by school practices that sort some students into high-quality programs and other students into low-quality education. CRESPAR believes that schools must replace the "sorting paradigm" with a "talent development" model that sets high expectations for all students, and ensures that all students receive a rich and demanding curriculum with appropriate assistance and support.

The mission of the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR) is to conduct the research, development, evaluation, and dissemination needed to transform schooling for students placed at risk. The work of the Center is guided by three central themes—ensuring the success of all students at key development points, building on students' personal and cultural assets, and scaling up effective programs—and conducted through research and development programs in the areas of early and elementary studies; middle and high school studies; school, family, and community partnerships; and systemic supports for school reform, as well as a program of institutional activities.

CRESPAR is organized as a partnership of Johns Hopkins University and Howard University, and supported by the National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students (At-Risk Institute), one of five institutes created by the Educational Research, Development, Dissemination and Improvement Act of 1994 and located within the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) at the U.S. Department of Education. The At-Risk Institute supports a range of research and development activities designed to improve the education of students at risk of educational failure because of limited English proficiency, poverty, race, geographic location, or economic disadvantage.

ABSTRACT

In this report, transitional programs refer to instructional programs for students who have been schooled in their native language and are now in "transitional" classrooms where literacy instruction takes place in English. Transition usually occurs during the elementary years but may occur in middle and high school for older students recently arrived in U.S. schools who are entering English-only literacy programs in the U.S. With regard to the development of literacy and transition from a first language to a second language, the paper focuses on school-age children who are acquiring English as a second language, where English is the societal language.

The author first examines the role of first language proficiency in second language literacy, reviewing relevant evaluation studies as well as studies that explicitly investigate the transfer of skills from a first language to English. Understanding these aspects of transfer is important in planning transition programs; the information helps educators determine when English language learners (ELLs) should be transitioned into English instruction and the skills they are likely to have learned that will support the acquisition of English literacy. This is followed by a discussion of the relationship between English oral proficiency and literacy instruction in English and the educational implications that ensue, and a description of the elements of successful transition programs for English language learners. The report concludes with recommendations for research and practice.

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INTRODUCTION

In this report, transitional programs refer to instructional programs for students who have been schooled in their native language and are now in "transitional" classrooms where literacy instruction takes place in English. Transition usually occurs during the elementary years but may occur in middle and high school for new U.S. students who have been schooled in their native country and are entering English-only literacy programs in the United States. With regard to the development of literacy and transition from a first language to a second language, the report focuses on school-age children who are acquiring English as a second language, where English is the societal language. Thus, the focus of the report is more narrow than transitional bilingual education programs,[1] although the report may help inform English literacy instruction for students in these programs if they have been instructed in Spanish before transitioning to English literacy instruction.

Regardless of the nature and timing of the transition, if it is not handled with care, it can be problematic for these students (Ramirez, 1992). For example, Gersten (1996) found that students are more likely to be referred for compensatory or special education during the transition years. The goal of transitional programs is to provide transitioning students with the support they need to effectively move from instruction in their native language to instruction mostly in English and to adjust to a new culture.

To locate relevant research articles, the author searched the ERIC, PsycInfo, LLBA, and Sociological Abstracts databases for documents dating back to 1980. The exact keywords used in the different databases varied because each database has its own categorization of keywords and subject headings. In general, keywords defining the population (English-as-a-second-language, LEP or limited-English-proficient, non-English speaking, bilingual, linguistic minorities, and/or immigrants) were combined with keywords related to the development of English literacy and transition programs. Key words included: reading, literacy, language acquisition, second language learning, writing, language/reading/speech development, oral/verbal communication, vocalization, voice, grammar, transfer of training/learning/cognitive processes, and skill development. An additional search was made of MEDLINE and the MLA Bibliography using more general keywords. Few articles were found in those databases. Articles in refereed journals and chapters of relevant books were included, as were peer-reviewed research publications from

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[1] Note that the focus of this report is more narrow than on transitional programs as defined by Genesee (1999) as "those that provide academic instruction in English language learners' primary language as they learn English. Generally, these programs initially provide instruction in literacy and academic content areas through the medium of the students' first language, along with instruction in English oral development. As students acquire proficiency in oral English, the language in which academic subjects are taught gradually shifts from the students' first language to English, generally beginning with math computations."

the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence and the Center for Applied Linguistics.

This report first examines the role of first language proficiency in second language literacy. In this context, the report reviews relevant evaluation studies, as well as studies that explicitly investigate the transfer of skills from a first language to English. Understanding these aspects of transfer is important in planning transition programs; the information helps educators determine when English language learners (ELLs) should be transitioned into English instruction and the skills they are likely to have learned that will support the acquisition of English literacy. The report next discusses the relationship between English oral proficiency and literacy instruction in English and the educational implications that ensue. The third section of the report describes elements of successful transition programs for English language learners. The report concludes with recommendations for research and practice.

ROLE OF FIRST LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN SECOND LANGUAGE READING

Studies that Examine the Role of the First Language in the Acquisition of Literacy in English

Two major longitudinal studies that address the relationship between amount of schooling in a first language and subsequent performance in English report that higher levels of literacy skills in the native language are associated with higher performance in English literacy. The first is a study by Collier and Thomas (1989) of age and rate of the acquisition of a second language for academic purposes by advantaged second language learners with a middle-class background and adequate education in their first language. Across all subject areas tested and all grade levels combined, ELLs arriving in the United States between the ages of 8 and 11 were the fastest achievers when compared to students arriving at 5 to 7 or 12 to 15 years. In reading, on the one test that focused on a programmatic measure of language proficiency, all those who took tests in fourth through sixth grades achieved the 51st NCE after 3 to 4 years of residence in the U.S. Those taking the eighth-grade reading test, however, reached only the 47th NCE after living in the U.S. for 4 to 5 years.[2] The data imply that children arriving when they are aged 5 to 7 might acquire English for academic purposes more rapidly if they

[2] It should be noted that Collier and Thomas, projecting the present pattern of 8- to 11-year-old arrivals' increases made each year, assert that it would require 3-4 more years of continuing cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) development and subject knowledge in the L2 for second language learners to catch up with their peers.

were provided with a minimum of 2 years of continuing cognitive academic development in their first language (L1). Those arriving in the U.S. when they are 12 to 15 years of age encounter more challenging curricula and, thus, cannot afford to lose time away from academic classes taught in English. These subjects might be taught either through the L1 or through intensive courses taught in the second language (L2) until students are sufficiently proficient in English to be able to work at grade level.

The Longitudinal Study of Immersion and Dual Language Instructional Programs for Language Minority Children (Immersion Study) (Ramirez, Yuen, Ramey, & Pasta, 1991), conducted by Aguirre International, was a quasi-experimental longitudinal comparison of three types of programs: English-only immersion, early-exit bilingual (also known as transitional bilingual), and late-exit bilingual (also known as maintenance bilingual). This study is instructive because in the context of evaluating program types, it attempts to examine the amount of Spanish instruction most conducive to literacy development in English. The major findings of the comparison of program types were summarized by the U.S. Department of Education (1991). After 4 years in their respective programs, English language learners in immersion-strategy and early-exit programs demonstrated comparable skills in mathematics, language, and reading when tested in English. There were differences among the three late-exit sites in achievement level in the same subjects: students at the site with the most use of Spanish and at the site with the most use of English ended sixth grade with the same skills in English language and reading; students at the two late-exit sites that used the most Spanish showed higher growth in mathematics skills than those at the site that abruptly transitioned into almost all English instruction. Students in all three sites realized growth in English-language and reading skills that was at least as rapid as the norming population (presumably children in a variety of instructional settings). The authors conclude that instruction in the native language does not impede the acquisition of English skills.

The Immersion Study was reviewed by a National Research Council panel of the Committee on National Statistics (Meyer & Fienberg, 1992). The primary focus of the panel's report was the appropriateness of the statistical methods used in those studies. Because of methodological problems the Immersion Study was not deemed to provide decisive evidence about the effectiveness of bilingual programs. The study took place at nine sites, but five of them had only one of the three types of programs (Ramirez et al., 1991). In fact, the late-exit bilingual program was completely confounded with site. Despite sophisticated statistical models of growth, the conclusions from the study are seriously compromised by the non-comparability of sites. According to the National Research Council report, however, findings from the comparisons that were most sound with respect to study design and sample characteristics indicate that kindergarten and first grade students who received academic instruction in Spanish had higher achievement in reading than comparable students who received academic instruction in English.

Studies that Examine the Transfer of Component Skills from L1 to L2

Examining the research base on transfer of component skills from a first language (L1) to a second language (L2, in this case English) is important in that it sheds light on the skills literate speakers can build on when acquiring English literacy. Likewise, it helps indicate what new skills ELLs will need to learn as they acquire English literacy. Following is a brief review of this literature.

Phonological Processes. Phonological awareness, or awareness that speech is composed of smaller units of sound, is believed to facilitate the understanding of the relationship between sounds and symbols in alphabetic languages (Adams, 1990; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Durgunoglu, Nagy, and Hancin-Bhatt (1993) conducted a study that examined whether second language word recognition skills were influenced by a child's phonemic awareness in the native language. In this study, first grade Spanish-speaking students in a transitional bilingual education program were identified by their teachers as non-fluent readers. The students were tested individually on a letter naming task, a Spanish phonological awareness test, a Spanish and English word recognition task, an English word reading task, an English-derived pseudoword task, and a Spanish and English oral proficiency test. The predictability of English word and pseudoword reading from Spanish phonological awareness was examined via multiple regression analyses using Spanish and English oral proficiency, English word recognition, letter identification, Spanish word recognition, and Spanish phonological awareness as predictor variables. The results indicated that Spanish word recognition significantly predicted performance on the English word and pseudoword reading. Additionally, Spanish phonological awareness predicted English word reading. These results led the researchers to suggest that native-language (Spanish) phonological-awareness training could facilitate children's ability to read in English.

Orthographic Skills. Fashola, Drum, Mayer, and Sang-Jin Kang (1996) examined whether Spanish-speaking second, third, fifth, and sixth grade students would produce more errors consistent with the correct application of Spanish phonological and orthographic rules than English-speaking students. For example, the correct application of Spanish orthographic rules to the sounds of English words would result in using the "i" for the /ee/ sound, "qu" for the /k/ sound and "j" for the /h/ sound. Findings indicated that Spanish-speaking students produced more than four times as many predicted errors as the English-speaking students, whereas the groups did not differ significantly in their production of non-predicted errors.

Word and Pseudoword Reading. The studies reviewed in this area have all reported evidence consistent with the notion that orthographic skills can be transferred from the native language to the second language. In a study of 37 bilingual Portuguese-Canadian children,

aged 9-12, Fontoura and Siegel (1995) found a significant relationship between the acquisition of word and pseudoword reading, working memory, and syntactic awareness in the two languages, Portuguese and English. All children came from Portuguese-speaking homes, but the language of instruction was English with the exception of 20-30 minutes a day when they learned reading and writing in Portuguese.[3] The relationship between English and Portuguese reading, language, and memory skills was highly correlated. Thus, bilingual children with reading problems in English were likely to show problems in their other language, suggestive of general language deficits in some children. The reading disabled Portuguese-English bilingual children, however, had significantly higher scores on the English pseudoword reading and word spelling tasks than a comparison group of reading disabled students who spoke only English. This finding may reflect a positive transfer from the more predictable grapheme-phoneme conversation rules of Portuguese to the opaque orthography of English. In addition, the results of the study show that bilingualism is not an impediment to the development of reading, syntactic, and memory skills. Most of the children from Portuguese-speaking homes who were being educated in English but receiving some instruction in Portuguese performed very well on the reading, memory, and language task in both English and Portuguese.

Word Knowledge. A limited number of studies has sought relationships between vocabulary knowledge and reading for ELLs (see Fitzgerald, 1995, for a review). These studies conclude that English vocabulary is a primary determinant of reading comprehension for such readers, and that those whose first language has many cognates with English have an advantage in recognizing English vocabulary. They often do not, however, fully exploit cognate relationships to optimize English vocabulary comprehension without targeted instruction. A study conducted by Nagy, Garcia, Durgunoglu, and Hancin-Bhatt (1993) investigated how Hispanic bilingual students' knowledge of Spanish vocabulary and ability to identify Spanish-English cognates relates to their comprehension of English expository text. The subjects were 74 upper-elementary Hispanic students who were able to read in both Spanish and English. Students were tested for Spanish and English vocabulary knowledge, and, after reading each of four expository texts containing English words with Spanish cognates, were given a multiple-choice test on their understanding of key concepts from these texts. Data from these assessments were analyzed in relation to two questions. First, is there a relationship between students' knowledge of concepts and vocabulary in Spanish

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[3] The author defines phonological processing as the association of sounds with letters, that is, understanding of grapheme-phoneme conversion rules and the exceptions to these rules. Syntactic awareness or grammatical sensitivity refers to the explicit understanding of the syntax of the language and appears to be critical to fluent and efficient reading of text which requires making predictions about the words that come next in the sequence. Working memory refers to the retention of information in short-term storage while processing incoming information and retrieving information from long-term storage. It is relevant because the reader must decode and or recognize words while remembering what has been read and retrieve information such as grapheme-phoneme conversion rules.

and their ability to understand English vocabulary? Second, if such a relationship exists, to what extent is it accounted for by students' knowledge of cognates? The results revealed that the best performance on the English multiple choice vocabulary test was obtained by students who both had knowledge of the concept in Spanish and who were most sophisticated at recognizing the cognate status of words.

In a second study, Cunningham and Graham (2000) investigated the effects of Spanish immersion on children's native English vocabulary. Thirty fifth- and sixth-grade immersion students and 30 English monolinguals were matched on grade, sex, and verbal scores on a fourth-grade Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT). They completed 60 consecutive Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) items and a 20-item Spanish-English Cognate Test similar to the PPVT on recognizing low-frequency English words with high-frequency Spanish cognates. The CAT and conventionally scored PPVT revealed comparable verbal ability between groups, but on 60 consecutively scored PPVT items, immersion students did better than control students because of cognates. They also significantly outperformed control students on the Spanish-English Cognate Test. Findings support the premise that Spanish immersion has English-language benefits and that positive transfer occurs from Spanish as a foreign language to native English receptive vocabulary. This is logical, due to the Latin base of Spanish and the Latin base of many low-frequency English words. For example, the word "embarkation" would be difficult for an English-only child, but easy for a bilingual child who would know the Spanish word "barca," which forms its root.

Syntax. Skilled readers use syntactic information unconsciously to make the reading process more efficient, for example, by fixating on high-information items in the text (Rayner & Pollatsek, 1989). Since high-information items differ from language to language, this can lead to inefficient fixation patterns when reading in a second language (Bernhardt, 1987), perhaps disrupting the fluency that facilitates comprehension.

Comprehension Skills and Strategies. Several studies have examined the cross-language transfer of comprehension skills and strategies. Royer and Carlo (1991) examined the transfer of listening and reading comprehension skills from Spanish to English by 49 sixth-grade students enrolled in a transitional bilingual education program. Results indicated that students' English reading performance at the end of sixth grade was most highly correlated with their reading in Spanish a year earlier. That is, good fifth grade readers in Spanish became good sixth grade readers in English. Listening skills in L2 were also related to L2 reading skills. There was not a significant correlation between Spanish listening skills in fifth grade and English listening skills in sixth grade. Thus, the authors claim that basic interpersonal communication skills acquired in one language do not seem to transfer to a second language, whereas skills that are academically mediated (transfer of learned academic strategies), such as reading, do seem to transfer.

A case study of an excellent Spanish-English bilingual reader (Jiménez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1995) shows the use of similar strategies for identifying words and comprehending text in both languages, and the frequent use of information from the other language. A larger-scale study carried out by the same group (Jiménez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1996) suggests that successful bilingual readers all used certain strategies for comprehending both Spanish and English texts—focusing on unknown words, using cognates as one source of knowledge, monitoring their comprehension, making inferences, and actively using prior knowledge. Unsuccessful readers focused much less on comprehension as their goal.

Langer, Bartolome, Vasquez, and Lucas (1990) investigated the ways in which Mexican American students construct meaning when reading school materials. Twenty-five fifth-grade students were asked to read both Spanish and English stories and informational pieces. Interspersed questions, post-reading probes, and oral and written recalls were designed to tap their understanding of text over time, as well as what they recalled after reading each piece. Meaning-making was defined as students' ability to make sense of what they read, use hypothesizing strategies, understand the language of the text, and demonstrate familiarity with the characteristics of the genres they read. The authors found that beyond the necessity for a basic (but limited) knowledge of English, the students' abilities to use good meaning-making strategies made a difference in how well they comprehended in both Spanish and English. For the students in the study, the use of good meaning-making strategies, rather than degree of fluency in English, differentiated the better from the poorer readers. Thus, students who had developed good meaning-making strategies in one language used those strategies in their second language even though they were not as fluent in it. These findings support Cummins' (1984) interdependence principle that a "common underlying proficiency" makes the transfer of literacy skills possible across languages.

Implications for Research and Practice

As Carlo (2001) comments in a recent review, "research on cross-language transfer has made some progress with regard to the issue of identifying particular skills that appear susceptible to transfer from first- to second-language reading. However, questions remain concerning the specification of the cognitive mechanisms responsible for transfer as well as the developmental parameters that constrain transfer effects." Carlo points out that mechanisms responsible for transfer could be occurring at a conscious metacognitive level, at a conscious declarative level, as well as at an unconscious procedural level. For example, in the realm of word identification, metalinguistic knowledge would entail a general understanding of how sounds map onto graphemes in an alphabetic language. Declarative knowledge would entail knowing that the letter "p" in Spanish says /p/ and using this knowledge to read the letter "p" in English. Procedural knowledge would entail automatic recognition of the letter

"p" in Spanish and thus automatic access to the saying the sound /p/ when encountering the letter "p" in English. Finally, one cannot rule out the possibility that non-language specific skills such as memory account for at least some of the relationship between component literacy skills across languages. The processes that are involved in the transfer may differ depending on the age and/or level of first language literacy development of a child.

Instructionally relevant questions related to the transfer of skills also remain (August & Hakuta, 1997). First, is investment in first-language literacy training worthwhile for all combinations of first and second languages? For example, is it worthwhile if orthographies differ radically from English (e.g., Chinese) or if the first language is a traditionally non-literate one (e.g., Hmong)? Second, how much instruction in the various component skills in the first language should children receive before transitioning into instruction in the second language? For example, at what point is reading ability in Spanish a sufficient base for initiating and facilitating literacy instruction in English? Is there a threshold of accomplishment in Spanish literacy below which positive effects on English literacy acquisition cannot be identified? Conversely, do Spanish-speaking children initially instructed in English literacy suffer any added risk of reading problems? What is the best way for teachers to assess these skills? What other factors should be considered in determining the level of Spanish literacy prerequisite to successful English reading? Such factors include Spanish oral language proficiency, intelligence, background knowledge, family background, age, and level of schooling. How should some of these background variables and skills be assessed?

With regard to implications for instruction, this brief review indicates that children who learn to read in their first language before transitioning to English do as well reading in their second language as children who have not had this opportunity. Moreover, it appears that children who have had more time to develop their first language do better reading in their second language. The studies reviewed also indicate that children transfer a variety of component skills from their first language to their second, including phonological awareness, word reading, word knowledge, and comprehension strategies. Teachers should also be aware that sometimes transferring these skills from one language to another produces errors in English, such as when children spell English words according to first language rules (e.g., spelling the English word "ham" as "jam"). Knowing the strengths children bring to the process as a result of their first language, as well as the difficulties they might encounter and errors they may make when reading in their second language, can help inform the design and delivery of literacy instruction for second language learners.

THE ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH LITERACY

Overview

This report now turns to the role English language proficiency plays in the development of English literacy for ELLs. There has been considerable debate regarding the role of English language proficiency in the acquisition of English literacy and the requisite level of English proficiency necessary to begin literacy instruction in English.[4] Some educators have argued that some English proficiency is a necessary prerequisite (e.g., Krashen, 1985; Schmidt, 1993; Seda & Abramson, 1990; Wong Fillmore & Valadez, 1986). A recent National Research Council report (Snow et al., 1998) and an International Reading Association resolution (1998) suggest that if native language reading instruction does not precede or coincide with English reading instruction, then English reading instruction should be delayed until a modicum of oral English proficiency has been achieved (cited in Fitzgerald, 1999).

Others (most notably Fitzgerald, 1995, 1999) question the uni-directionality of the relationship between second-language oral proficiency and second-language reading. Fitzgerald (1999, p. 22) notes that "...these correlational studies do not provide support either for the position that English orality must precede English reading or vice versa." She maintains that findings are mixed, and the directionality of the relationships has not been investigated. Fitzgerald (1999) cites evidence that orality and literacy can develop concomitantly (Araujo, 1997; Edelsky, 1986; Fitzgerald & Noblit, 1999; Hudelson, 1984; Rigg, 1991; Weber & Longhi, 1996). Moreover, she provides evidence that suggests second-language learners' oral development can be enhanced through second language reading instruction (e.g., Elley, 1981; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983), and that some children's English reading may outpace their English orality in the early stages (Fitzgerald & Noblit,1999). Anderson and Roit (1996), Gersten (1996), and others concur that reading instruction focused on second-language comprehension can be helpful to learners at all levels of second-language oral proficiency (even for those with learning disabilities [Klingner & Vaughn, 1996]), and, in fact, that second-language reading comprehension can generate gains in second-language oral skills. Vernon and Ferreiro (1999) found that oral communication alone did not contribute to children's awareness of the sound structures of language. Their findings suggest that the use of reading and writing activities may contribute to children's sound structure awareness because as they read and then begin to write words that have meaning

[4] Fitzgerald defines two versions of this relationship: "In the first version, the relationship is directional. Second language reading is dependent upon second language oral proficiency. In the second, not only is the relationship directional, but a 'threshold of linguistic competence' is necessary for successful second language reading."

for them, they begin to analyze their own speech. In summary, as Ruddell and Unrau (1994) point out, beginning reading is a dynamic, complex transaction involving many features and processes. Beginning readers build hypotheses and test them in an attempt to construct meaning. In the process, they draw on the resources they have available, including their personal experiences, levels of oral and written language development, print, and instruction.

The following sections provide more detail regarding the importance of English oral language skills for the acquisition of English literacy by ELLs.

Print-Sound Code

With regard to breaking the print-sound code, the successful reader must have English skills in analyzing language to understand how the alphabetic code represents meaningful messages. Thus, knowledge available for analysis is a crucial factor in successful early reading (Bialystock, 1997). Typical English-speaking children have considerable knowledge available for analysis at the time they enter school: several thousand words in their vocabularies, some exposure to rhymes and alliterations, practice in writing their own names and "reading" environmental print, and other sources of information about the nature of the analysis in which they will be expected to engage. Non-English speakers are confronted with the task of analyzing a language they have not yet acquired.

Moreover, unavailability of semantic support for decoding that comes from familiarity with the words one reads also impacts children's ability to read (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). It is easier to read if one can "access" the meaning the words represent. English speakers making initial attempts at reading understand, if they are successful, the products of their efforts. They read words they know and sentences they understand. They can use context and probabilities effectively, and they can self-correct efficiently. Non-English speakers have much less basis for knowing whether their reading is correct because the crucial meaning-making process is short circuited by a lack of language knowledge. Giving a child initial reading instruction in a language that he or she does not yet speak, without the requisite oral language support, can thus undermine the child's chance to use meaning to support decoding (Bialystock, 1997).

Getting the Meaning

Skilled readers can tolerate a small proportion of unknown words in a text without disruption of comprehension and can even infer the meanings of those words from sufficiently rich contexts. If the proportion of unknown words is too high, however, comprehension is disrupted. Students have already learned approximately 5,000 to 7,000 words in their native

language before they begin formal reading instruction in schools. They also have a good intuitive sense of the grammar of the language. Second-language learners typically have not already learned a large store of oral language vocabulary in the second language, nor do they have a sufficiently complete sense of the grammar of the language (Singer, 1981, cited in Grabe, 1991).

A limited number of studies has sought relationships between vocabulary knowledge and reading for ELLs (e.g., Fitzgerald, 1995; Koda, 1989; Nagy, 1988; Stanovich, 1986). These studies conclude that English vocabulary is a primary determinant of reading comprehension for such readers. For example, Garcia's (1991) comparison of Latino and Anglo students' reading test performance in English revealed that the Latino students knew significantly less of the English vocabulary in the test passages than did the Anglo students. Interviews with a sub-sample of the students indicated that unfamiliar English vocabulary was the major linguistic factor that adversely affected the Latino students' reading test performance.

Jiménez, Garcia, and Pearson's (1995, 1996) think-aloud study of reading by bilingual, Latino middle-school students revealed similarities and differences in strategy use between 3 monolingual Anglo readers and 11 bilingual readers, depending on the bilingual students' reading levels. Findings similar to those of Garcia (1991), however, revealed that both the successful and less-successful bilingual readers encountered more unknown English vocabulary than the successful monolingual readers and had less knowledge about the topics of the readings.

Familiarity with English extends to topic knowledge. This is important because background knowledge is also an important determinant of comprehension (Carrell, 1987; Johnson, 1981; see Fitzgerald, 1995, for a review). Researchers (Garcia, 1991; Jiménez et al., 1995, 1996) have documented that bilingual children generally know less about topics in second-language texts. Garcia reports that even when U.S. Spanish-speaking Latino and monolingual Anglo (non-Latino White) fifth and sixth graders had been in the same English-speaking classrooms for 2 years, they differed significantly in their background knowledge for standardized reading test passages in English, with Latino students knowing less about specific topics. When differences in prior knowledge were controlled, there were no significant differences between the two groups of students in reading test performance.

Implications for Research and Practice

With young children, thinking has focused on issues such as how much oral language a child needs to know before literacy instruction should begin; with older second-language learners, it is possible that literacy can be a major source of language learning (August & Hakuta,

1997). It is unknown, though, how effective literacy is as a language-learning strategy, whether it has consequences for oral proficiency, or at what age or for what types of learners it works best. Other important questions also remain: What are the components of English proficiency that most influence English literacy and writing? and Do the skills and level of skill differ for different age children, classroom task domains, and other child variables such as IQ, background knowledge, and native language literacy?

Because many English language learners arrive in the United States after having acquired literacy in their first language, understanding how to use easily developed second-language literacy skills to promote oral proficiency safely and effectively is important. Research in this area is particularly important because (a) educators need guidance about the level of second-language proficiency at which literacy instruction in a second language can most efficiently be initiated; and (b) educators need to understand the nature of the cognitive challenge faced by the many children in immersion or submersion situations for whom oral language and literacy skills are acquired in the second language simultaneously.

Research questions aside, the primary educational implication is that for ELLs, English proficiency needs to be developed in the context of reading and writing. Teachers need to attend to the role that English proficiency plays in children's efforts to read and write in English. Moreover, it is important that teachers monitor students' progress to ensure that they are comprehending the English they hear and read. The sections that follow provide more specific guidance toward this end.

DESCRIPTION OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR STUDENTS IN TRANSITION PROGRAMS

Two Effective Programs

Bilingual Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition and Success for All. Bilingual Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (BCIRC) is designed to help students succeed in reading in their home language, Spanish, and then make a successful transition to English (Calderón, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Slavin, 1998). The BCIRC program was designed for grades 2-5, with emphasis on grades 2-3, the time of transition from Spanish to English in many bilingual programs. BCIRC is an adaptation of Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC), originally developed at Johns Hopkins University for use with monolingual English speakers (Stevens & Durkin, 1992). The CIRC program consists of three principal elements: direct instruction in reading comprehension, "Treasure Hunt" activities, and integrated language arts and writing. Treasure Hunts are

worksheets that include comprehension questions, prediction guidelines, new vocabulary, story retell, and story-related writing suggestions. In all of these activities, students work in heterogeneous learning teams of four. All activities follow a series of steps that involve teacher presentation, team practice, independent practice, peer pre-assessment, additional practice, and testing.

The key elements of BCIRC and the original CIRC are essentially the same. However, several instructional strategies that have been found effective in teaching reading and writing in both the first and second language were incorporated into the BCIRC model. The activities focus on students' cultural backgrounds and building background and vocabulary before reading. Interaction and practice with peers help students develop fluency and comfort with English. Moreover, because students are learning the CIRC process in Spanish first, they are more easily transferable to the ESL context. Bilingual CIRC allows students to develop critical thinking skills by permitting them to use their first and second languages in cooperative peer exchanges around text discussions. Children generally exit BCIRC after the third grade.

Bilingual CIRC involves a set of activities that take place before, during, and after reading texts that are written for the program and controlled for language. Before reading, teachers build background knowledge and vocabulary, model how to make and confirm predictions, and have students work in teams of four to practice using the title and pictures of the story to make predictions. During the reading, teachers first read the story aloud to students. During a subsequent reading, students "whisper read" with the teacher. Students then partner read; they sit in pairs and take turns reading aloud, alternating paragraphs and assisting each other with decoding. After partner reading, each child reads the text silently. Following the reading, teachers use a variety of activities to build student comprehension and develop students' spelling and writing skills. To build comprehension, students engage in Treasure Hunts, story mapping, and story retell. After partner reading, pairs discuss the answers to questions on key elements of the narrative listed in a Treasure Hunt. After the Treasure Hunts have been completed, each team chooses from a variety of graphic organizers to map the story. Students retell stories to partners within their teams, using the maps or story outlines to evaluate their partners' verbal summaries. Afterward, students discuss with their partners what they liked about the story. To develop writing skills, students engage in story-related writing. Teachers model the writing process and then, with a partner or in teams, students write in various genres. Students help each other develop story lines and characters, sequence events, give each other feedback, and engage in a process of drafting, revising, rewriting, editing, and publishing. Students also discuss the meanings of five or more carefully selected words from the story and use these words in meaningful sentences that show the definition and a clear picture of the meaning of the words. In addition to writing, students learn to spell 10-12 words each week that are drawn from the stories they are

reading. Students also work on their own. Students are asked to read a trade book of their choice every evening for at least 20 minutes. Parents are encouraged to discuss the readings with their children and to initial forms indicating that students have read for the required time. Students earn points for their team if they submit a completed form each week. BCIRC also uses both partner checking and tests to monitor student progress. During partner checking, partners initial a student assessment form indicating they have completed the task and achieved its criterion. At the end of three class periods, students are given a comprehension test on the story.

An evaluation of BCIRC in the Ysleta Independent School District supported the expectation that students in transitional programs would gain in Spanish and English reading performance as a result of experiencing BCIRC in second and third grades.[5] The more years students were in the program, the better their English reading performance; students who experienced a full 2 years of BCIRC in second and third grades scored almost a full standard deviation higher than comparison students in reading. Third graders who had been in BCIRC were significantly more likely than comparison group students to meet criteria for exit from bilingual education reading and language. Qualitative evidence further supports the proposition that BCIRC increased the quality and quantity of task-focused interactions among students and their writing and composition skills. Qualitative researchers noted complex, insightful discussions among students in both Spanish (Prado-Olmos, Smith, & Symanski, 1993) and English (Durán & Szymanski, 1993).

Success for All (Slavin & Madden, 2001) incorporates many of the features of CIRC in transition contexts and has been found to be effective for English language learners. Researchers found that in the ESL adaptation of Success for All, effect sizes for all comparisons were positive, especially for Cambodian students in Philadelphia and Mexican American students in California. In Success for All, students are regrouped for reading. That is, during a regular 90-minute reading program they are grouped according to reading performance levels into reading classes of about 15 students all at the same level. The activities in the program provide a rapidly paced, engaging set of routines that involve students in group response games. These develop auditory discrimination skills, letter name and letter sound recognition, and sound blending strategies based on the sounds and words

[5] The study involved 222 students in bilingual programs in three experimental and four comparison schools, all of which were among the highest-poverty schools in the district. The seven lowest-achieving schools in the district with the highest percentages of Spanish-dominant LEP students were identified and then separated into two closely matched groups. The BCIRC and comparison schools were similar in demographic characteristics and academic ranking within the district. All served almost entirely Hispanic student bodies, and all had high percentages of LEP students. The research sample consisted entirely of Spanish-dominant LEP students. As a group, BCIRC schools were somewhat smaller than comparison schools and had higher percentages of Title I students. Within the experimental schools, individual classes were matched with classes in control schools based on mean pretest achievement scores.

used in the books. In addition, all schools provide instruction in English as a second language. After the reading period, ESL teachers tutor students individually or in small groups. The emphasis is on giving students assistance that is directly tied to success in reading.

Improving Literacy Achievement for English Learners in Transitional Bilingual Programs. The program developed by Saunders and Goldenberg (Saunders, 1999; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999) is a 3-year transition program implemented in grades 3-5. Grade 3 is explicitly considered a pre-transition year, grade 4 is Transition I, and grade 5 is Transition II. The 3-year design presumes that students receive effective language arts instruction and that they receive a coherent program of language arts instruction from grades 3 through 5, from primary language through transitional language arts. The pre-transition component is designed to emphasize the fundamental role of Spanish reading and writing and oral English development that precedes transition. The goal of the pre-transition component is to have all students performing at grade level in Spanish reading and writing, and at the speech emergence level (able to converse) or higher by the end of third grade. The concept of Transition I and II was designed to make explicit the need for a concrete transition program of serious substance and duration. By the end of Transition I (fourth grade), students are expected to decode and demonstrate basic understanding of grade-appropriate material and achieve intermediate fluency in oral English language appropriate to participate actively in academically oriented discussions. Students should continue to demonstrate grade level Spanish reading and writing proficiency. Likewise, by the end of Transition II, students should be decoding and comprehending grade-level material in English and be ready to enter mainstream classrooms. During Transition II, language arts instruction is provided exclusively in English.

Across all phases of the program, students study literature through an Experience-Text-Relationship approach that the authors adapted for this purpose. Through the use of ongoing discussions (instructional conversations), writing activities (literature logs and culminating writing projects), and reading, the teacher helps students study a story in relationship to their own experiences and a central theme. The study of literature is complemented by additional skill-building components. Students receive direct instruction in specific reading comprehension strategies (predicting, summarizing, questioning) and daily opportunities to read texts geared to their reading level, assigned as independent reading. The teacher also provides direct instruction on specific conventions of writing (punctuation, capitalization, grammar), and students practice writing. English language development through literature is a daily 45-minute oral English program used in the pre-transition phase of the program. Instruction is delivered to students in small, homogeneous groups based on their proficiency level. Lessons and independent activities are all drawn from a particular literature selection (typically one with predictable patterns, language

structures, and target vocabulary for various domains). Other supporting components include teacher read-alouds and pleasure reading designed to expose students to good literature and support their independent reading behaviors. Finally, many Transition I teachers use interactive journals during the first half of the year when students are making their attempts at English writing. Research results indicate that this transition program does a better job of cultivating literacy than the 3-6 month transition program students typically receive. Project students scored significantly higher than nonproject students in reading across grades 3-5, on both standardized and performance-based assessments, and regardless of language. In fifth grade, when most students took English standardized tests and all students took English performance assessments, project students scored significantly higher than nonproject students on every measure.

Cross-cutting Attributes of Effective Transition Programs

The following attributes were common to the few published studies on transitional programs for English language learners. As such, the review relies heavily on research conducted by Calderón et al. (1998), Gersten, (1996), Saunders (1999), and Saunders and Goldenberg (1999). Although the list is focused on literacy, it also includes factors deemed essential to students transitioning from one language to another (i.e., articulation and coordination, parental involvement, and additional services).

Articulation and Coordination Within and Between Schools. Effective transition programs are characterized by a smooth transition between levels of language development classes (e.g., between content-based ESL and sheltered instruction) and coordination and articulation between special second-language programs and other school programs, as well as between levels of schooling. Saunders (1999) found that the strongest evaluation results came from project schools in which students were exposed to the program's instructional components beginning in second grade in preparation for English-only classrooms in fourth grade and mainstream classrooms in fifth grade. Calderón and her colleagues (1998) combined Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) strategies (e.g., heterogeneous learning teams that work together to help each other learn academic material) with innovative transitional and ESL strategies as students began to transition from Spanish to English reading. The strategies were carefully coordinated.

Development of the Native Language Prior to Transition to English and Respect for Cultural Diversity. Two of the comprehensive programs cited (Calderón et al., 1998; Saunders, 1999) help develop students' native language before transitioning students into English. The first 2 years of the transition program developed by Saunders (second and third grade) included intensive Spanish reading and writing instruction and extensive oral English development in preparation for the 2 years of transitional language arts. Gersten (1996)

characterizes successful programs as those in which teachers "show respect for students as individuals, respond to things students say, show respect for culture and family and possess knowledge of cultural diversity, incorporate students' experiences into writing and language arts activities, attempt to link content to students' lives and experiences to enhance understanding, and view diversity as an asset rather than a deficit."

Interventions that Combine a Variety of Approaches (Explicit Skills Instruction and Student-Directed and Cooperative Work). CIRC and Bilingual CIRC (Calderón et al., 1998) and Success for All (Slavin & Madden, 2001) combine explicit skills instruction in reading comprehension with cooperative learning, partner reading, and checking. The same is true for Saunders et al. (in Gersten, 1996, p. 30):

> Like teachers described elsewhere, teachers and advisors in our project saw the need to be comprehensive, to synthesize across rather than put in opposition various approaches to teaching and learning [directed lessons and instructional conversation, literature, and basals, writing projects and dictations].

Saunders (1999) notes that one premise that undergirds their successful transition program is that it addresses "both meaning and skills, promotes both high-level thinking and appropriate drill and practice, and provides complementary portions of student- and teacher-centeredness."

Use of Strategies to Make Instruction Comprehensible to ELLs. The studies reviewed also note strategies to help make instruction comprehensible to English language learners: adjusting the level of English vocabulary and structure so it is appropriate for the students given their current level of proficiency in English; using explicit discourse markers such as "first" and next;" calling attention to the language in the course of using it; using the language in ways that reveal its structure; providing explicit discussion of vocabulary and structure; explaining and, in some cases, demonstrating what students will be doing or experiencing; providing students with appropriate background knowledge; building on students' previous knowledge and understanding to establish a connection between personal experience and the subject matter they are learning; and using manipulatives, pictures, objects, and film related to the subject matter (Gersten, 1996; Saunders, 1999).

CIRC (Calderón et al., 1998) and Success for All (Slavin & Madden, 2001), for example, use a set of activities before, during, and after reading to ensure that students understand the text. These include building background knowledge and vocabulary, making predictions, teacher and then student reading of the same selection, discussing answers to key questions, story mapping, story retelling, and story-related writing. Likewise, the language arts component in Saunders's and Goldenberg's transitional program (Saunders, 1999; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999) includes activities to ensure comprehension, such as literature logs in which students elaborate on something that has happened in the story or analyze or interpret

some aspect of the story or theme, and small group discussions in which teachers hear students articulate their understanding of a story and help students enrich and deepen their understanding of it. Students also learn specific strategies to use while they are reading to monitor their comprehension.

Opportunities for Practice. This attribute entails building redundancy into activities, giving English language learners opportunities to interact with fluent English-speaking peers, providing opportunities for extended dialogue, and giving students enough time to acquire the skills they need before they stop receiving special language-related services. With regard to redundancy, Saunders (1999) helps students "work the text," which means studying it carefully—reading it, rereading it, discussing it, writing about it, and listening to what others have written about it. Through interactions with native speakers, second-language learners gain access to language that is unavailable in traditional teacher-directed classroom settings. BCIRC (Calderón et al., 1998) and Success for All (Slavin & Madden, 2001) provide opportunities for English language learners to interact with peers, which helps students develop fluency in, and comfort with, English.

In addition, effective teachers create opportunities for extended dialogue to enhance English acquisition and learning. Gersten (1996) notes that effective teachers use questions that press students to clarify or expand on initial statements, as well as encourage students to participate in conversations. Recently, a good deal of attention has been paid to instructional conversations—discussion-based lessons that focus on an idea or concept that has both educational value and meaning and relevance for students (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999). The teacher encourages students to express their ideas either orally or in writing and guides them to increasingly sophisticated levels of understanding. Saunders and Goldenberg (1999) found that students who have opportunities to use language to elaborate and develop ideas in writing and discussion outperform their peers who do not. In a recent study, the authors report that fourth grade English language learners who participated in an instructional conversation outperformed comparable students who participated in a more conventional or basal-like recitation lesson.

Opportunities for practice also entail giving students the time they need to develop adequate English skills before entering mainstream classrooms. In the successful program developed by Saunders and Goldenberg (1999), students were enrolled in 2 years of transitional programming rather than the 3-6 month district-sponsored program that it replaced.

Integration of Reading, Writing, and Oral Language Development. Given the important role that English proficiency plays in the acquisition of literacy, it should be developed in the context of teaching ELLs to read in English. With regard to even English proficient students, Menyuk (1999, p. 24) asserts that oral language development must occur

both independently of reading and writing development, and also in a symbiotic relation with reading and writing development:

> What happens in the classroom—in terms of oral language interactions, what happens within the classroom and school, communication between teachers and students and among students—can also affect language development, and by extension, affect development of reading and writing. (p. 25)

In their effective transitional program, Saunders and Goldenberg (1999) integrate reading, writing (literature logs and culminating writing projects), and oral language (instructional conversations) in the study of literature:

> Discussions set up writing assignments, and writings inform subsequent discussions throughout the course of the literature unit. Writing is an individual opportunity to teach students to think about and articulate ideas, interpretations, and related experiences. Discussions provide a social opportunity for students and teacher to collaboratively build more elaborate and sophisticated understandings.

BCIRC (Calderón et al., 1998) also integrates reading, writing, and oral language. According to the authors, as students began to transition from Spanish to English reading, an adaptation of CIRC was used. The CIRC strategies were combined with innovative transitional and ESL strategies. The combined sequence of activities offered students rich language experiences that integrated speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Effective teachers observed by Gersten (1996) integrated reading, writing, and discussion.

Building on Prior Knowledge and Experience. Effective transition programs build on students' prior knowledge and skills. One effective literature program (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999) builds upon students' existing knowledge, skills, and experiences and makes explicit connections between students' background knowledge and the academic curriculum. The authors maintain that building students' background knowledge before, and throughout, the literature unit helps contextualize story themes, content, and vocabulary. Drawing upon, sharing, and discussing students' relevant personal experiences sustains motivation and helps students make concrete and conceptual connections to the text, its content, and the themes under study (1999, p. 4). BCIRC also builds on students' prior knowledge (Calderón et al., 1998). To provide appropriate background for student comprehension and ease of text interaction, teachers survey each selection, identify content that may be unfamiliar, and use activities such as semantic maps and group discussions to build background knowledge. Gersten (1996) notes that in effective programs, teachers develop relevant background knowledge by assessing whether students have background knowledge, building key vocabulary words and concepts, using consistent language, and incorporating students' primary language in a meaningful way.

Parental Involvement. The parents of ELLs may not be literate in English. Parents who are literate in their native language, however, should be encouraged to use that language with their children in both conversations and literacy-related activities. Conversations in students' homes in a first and/or second language have been shown to support the learning of a new language (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). First-language proficiency and skills have been shown to facilitate English-language proficiency and literacy generally (Hakuta & Gould, 1987; Saville-Troike, 1984). BCIRC (Calderón et al., 1998) encourages parents to discuss students' independent readings and initial forms indicating that students have read for the required 20 minutes.

Additional Services. As a response to the rapid growth in immigrants during the 1980s and 1990s, school districts developed programs to serve limited-English-proficient newcomers. These programs can be considered transition programs because the students who enter them have usually been schooled in their native language and through temporary transition programs are provided with a comprehensive array of academic and support services to help them prepare for mainstream classrooms. According to Friedlander (1991) and Short and Boyson (1997) these include: familiarizing students with their new environment (school, educational expectations, community, and the United States); designing special curriculum oriented to developing both language and academic skills; orienting parents to the U.S.; offering ESL classes for parents; making special efforts to communicate with parents; and providing referral services and access to bilingual support personnel (e.g., nurses, psychologists, peer counselors). They are mentioned here because newcomers placed in standard transitional programs would likely benefit from additional services geared toward their special needs. Besides transitional programs, English language development, and access to content knowledge appropriate to the level of knowledge with which they arrive, students should be introduced to the school, educational system, community, and American culture and society. Newcomers who may be suffering from physical problems and emotional stress related to immigration would benefit from support services such as counseling and healthcare.

Implications for Research and Practice

Although there is some empirical research on transition programs and practices for ELLs, it is limited. A next step to strengthen the knowledge base might be to take findings from rigorous research on effective reading strategies for English-only students, use theory to determine which components of reading are likely to be the most necessary for ELLs who are transitioning from Spanish instruction (e.g., word meaning), develop interventions based on these findings and theory, and apply and rigorously evaluate these strategies, first in experimental settings, and, if found effective, in classrooms.

Readers should be cautioned that the attributes described above generally appeared in comprehensive programs for English language learners that may have been effective because

of synergy among the multiple factors. Thus, it cannot be assumed that the collection of individual components creates necessary or sufficient conditions for developing an effective transition program for ELLs. Educators who work in transition programs, however, might use these attributes as a starting point for examining the effectiveness of their programs.

CONCLUSION

As educators work to develop second-language literacy in ELL children, they should bear in mind that individual differences and contextual factors will influence each child's rate of development. English language learners vary profoundly in prior schooling and the opportunities they have had to develop high levels of language and literacy in the home language. A child's educational background and reading ability in the native language will impact the task of learning to read in a second language (see previous section on the transfer of skills). For example, children who had attended school and established basic literacy skills in a native language before emigrating to the United States achieved academic parity with peers as soon as they had acquired proficiency in English in U.S. schools. In contrast, younger arrivals showed long-lasting negative effects on academic achievement associated with initial literacy instruction in English (Collier & Thomas, 1989). Similar findings for Finnish speakers in Sweden have been reported by Skutnabb-Kangas (1979, cited in Snow et al., 1998).

Educators would also do well to keep in mind the considerable amount of time it takes ELLs to develop both oral English proficiency and academic proficiency commensurate with those of their English-speaking peers. Hakuta and colleagues (1999) report: "Even in districts that are considered the most successful in teaching English to LEP (limited-English proficient) students, oral proficiency in English takes 3 to 5 years to develop, and academic English proficiency can take 4 to 7 years." Of note and concern is that the gap between ELLs and their peers markedly widens in the fifth grade; first and third graders are just 1 year behind native English speakers in basic reading, reading comprehension, and broad reading, but at fifth grade they are about 2 full years behind. Moreover, there are clear effects for poverty. Students in the 70% poverty category lag considerably behind more economically-advantaged groups.

The purpose of this report has been to examine factors that bear on the development of English literacy for students who have first learned to read in their native language. Such factors include the role of children's first language and English-language proficiency in the acquisition of English literacy, as well as what is known about the attributes of effective transition programs for English language learners. With carefully crafted, research-based instruction and support, as well as attention to the individual differences and needs of children transitioning into English, educators can help English language learners become highly literate in English.

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